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CHRIST AND SOCIAL UNREST ¹

I SHALL read from the eleventh chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew, beginning with the 28th verse: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

In a little town, in a cowshed, some two thousand years ago there was born a boy baby. He grew up in an humble home, a day laborer, a carpenter. Holman Hunt, in one of his great paintings, presents this young man as a carpenter, standing by his bench with plane in his hand, and shavings at his feet. He wrote no books, he painted no pictures, he marshalled no armies; he accumulated no wealth,—despised by his own people, rejected and denounced by his own church, crucified between two thieves, and died at the hands of a mob. His purpose in the world was threefold: to show us God, to redeem humanity, and to establish a spiritual kingdom. He was the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of His person.

Philip said to him on one occasion: "Show us the Father and it satisfieth us". The Master's reply was: "Have I been so long with you and yet hast thou not known me,

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Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, show us the Father?"

This is an old text, or paragraph of the Scripture that I have read; and I wish this morning to give to it perhaps a new interpretation or application rather than the ordinary exposition to which we preachers have become accustomed to present this subject. Not new in the sense that we have never before had the problems of social unrest in the world,—but new in the sense that perhaps today social unrest is accentuated and intensified by the after effects of our world war.

I wish to speak this morning to this splendid class of a changeless Christ, in the midst of a changing world.

This passage of Scripture brings us face to face with the Man of Galilee, in the midst of the crying needs of a helpless people. It has been said that the eleventh chapter of Matthew is the beginning of discouragements in the ministry of Jesus.

The first discouraging circumstance that you will find in this chapter is the doubt of John, the forerunner of Christ, who is now in prison. John sent two of his disciples to Jesus, asking the question: "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" The Master replied: "Go and tell John the blind receive their sight, the deaf hear, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the poor have the gospel preached unto them". Then he warns the people not to judge John harshly. Don't judge John by his one act of expressing doubt. A very good man will sometimes do wrong, and a very bad man will sometimes do right. The only way to pass a just judgment upon any man is to take the output of his life. What does he stand for? It would be very unfair to pass judgment upon John

because of the doubt he is expressing over here in prison,—a good man; don't judge him harshly.

Then the next discouraging circumstance that we find in this chapter is the unreasonableness of the people,—and that is one of the greatest problems you are going to meet in life, my young friends—the unreasonableness of people. They rejected John because he was an ascetic: he came neither eating nor drinking; and they rejected Christ because he was a plain man, one who lived as other men lived: he came eating and drinking. And Jesus likened them unto children playing in the market,—we have piped unto you, and you have not danced, and we have mourned and you would not lament. One company wanted to play wedding and one wanted to play funeral. That is the picture drawn in this lesson,—the unreasonableness of the people.

The next circumstance in this context is the unrepenting city. "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes."

And then the Master lifted his eyes toward heaven and said: "Father, I thank thee that thou hast withheld these things from the wise, the worldly wise, and revealed them unto babes". And then, it seems, he threw himself in the very path of struggling humanity.

It seems that the Master here begins to realize it is not doctrine that the people need, but a life: not a code or creed, but faith in a divine human personality; and he throws himself in the path of this struggling mass of humanity and says: "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest".

Someone has said that the Master here seems to present a pessimistic view of life. He presents life in this text

under two figures,—that of a beast of burden staggering under his load, and that of a sinking ship going down beneath the waves too heavily laden. These are the figures used in this text. And some have supposed that the Master, looking out upon the world with all of its social unrest, with all of its problems, with all of its distressing conditions, is indicated in this text as presenting rather a pessimistic view of life. But Jesus was not an optimist. Neither was he a pessimist. He gave to the world the Christian view of life and the Christian view of life sees its problems, recognizes its difficulties, appreciates its struggles, and stands with supreme confidence in the consciousness of the divine remedy. That is Christianity.

I wish now to notice especially this condition: I said a moment ago that Jesus came into the world to show us God; to reveal him unto us. That was the primary purpose of his coming. I wish to say now that it is the business of the Church of Jesus Christ to reveal Christ to the world. That is our business. It is the business of the Church to show Jesus to the world in all his human and divine capacity, his redemptive mission; that is the mission of the Church today.

We find the social problem of unrest in the home; we find it in the state; we find it in the school; we find it in the industrial world; we find it in the Church of Jesus Christ, but I repeat again that it is the mission of the Church to present Jesus to the world in all these relations.

The Church has not succeeded in making Christianity big enough for the whole world. That is our failure. I would repeat it, and say that the Church has not succeeded in making Christianity big enough for the whole world. The Church has given to Christianity an individualistic interpretation; the Church has given an attractive

ceremonial interpretation; the Church has given a splendid theological interpretation, but so far it has failed to give a full and comprehensive social interpretation of the teachings and mission of Jesus Christ. The Church must insist that Christianity includes the business of the world; that Christianity includes the home; that Christianity includes the state; that Christianity includes the schools; that Christianity includes the nations of earth,—“His Kingdom ruleth over all,”—railroads and mines, factories, stocks and bonds, and nations. The kingdoms of earth shall become the kingdom of our God and his Christ.

The present social unrest is a direct challenge to the Church to make Christianity all that Christ intended it to be. We have in the past been too much inclined to interpret our religion in terms of the future. The Church at one time was inclined to ask the applicant for church membership—though he might have been a red-blooded boy, or a blooming maiden—the question, “Are you prepared to die?” And then when the answer came in the affirmative—which was never true—the congregation would be asked to stand and extend the right hand of fellowship to the new member, while they sang: “I want to be an angel, and with the angels stand; a crown upon my forehead and a harp within my hand”; when, as a matter of fact, you will never be an angel: you will be something better if you live a true life; you will be a redeemed human being—a redeemed spirit.

Human society in the Christian sense is organized around the two greatest commandments, the first: Love the Lord, thy God; and the second: Love thy neighbor as thyself; and around these the Christian conception of human society is organized. The first commandment regulates the individual; the second commandment regulates society. This

is also evident in the Sermon on the Mount where the Master said: "Ye are the light of the world; ye are the salt of the earth,"—speaking to his redeemed church.

In the solution of the problem of social unrest Christ laid down three primary laws: the law of regeneration, the law of righteousness, and the law of love.

Modern sociology has failed in not recognizing this first law—the law of regeneration—and has attempted the utterly hopeless task of organizing society upon an impure and an unholy basis. The most fundamental thing in society is personality. Man's relationship in life cannot be regulated while man himself is wrong. Christ knew human nature, and he knew unredeemed, unregenerate human nature was selfish.

You remember that instance—a rather amusing one, rather a piece of humor—when Nicodemus came to the Master asking the way of life. Now Nicodemus was an old politician, and he came to Jesus by night. He believed that Christ was in the world to establish an earthly kingdom, and so he came to Jesus by night, wanting to get in on the ground floor on this new administration. He must have been startled when the Master said: "Ye must be born again; I am not here to build up an earthly kingdom; I am not here to rule as an earthly king; I am here to establish a spiritual kingdom, and in order to come into my kingdom, to enter into fellowship with me, ye must be born again". The heart must be changed before the life can be regulated. I wish you would get that, for it is fundamental. The whole question of sociology rests here. The heart must be changed before the life can be regulated.

The prayer of David: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me". Then will I teach; then will I go out to perform my duty; then will

I thrust my life out in the walks of humanity—but not until then.

The second law is the law of righteousness. The law of regeneration gives us proper motives for living; the law of righteousness gives us the principle by which we may determine what is right, and that law of righteousness is imbedded in the golden rule: "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them".

We are being told today that Christian principles are not applicable to living conditions. Jesus Christ would have his Church say to the world of commerce: "Your business is to make men and not to make money". Christ put his life and his principles into the throbbing business world, but there is where the Church has failed. We talk too much about dying, and too much about heaven, and too much about these by-products of Christianity, and have failed to put the principles of Christ in the business world.

"Come unto me; take my yoke upon you, and learn of me." That is the message of the Master. He would have his Church say to the home: "Your business is to put Christ into this high and holy institution and live righteous lives". He would have his Church say to the nations of the earth: "Peace, peace, be unto you; away with your heathenish practice of blood and war", for you can study the tracks of history from the battle of Marathon until the world conflict in France and every step has been heathenish and unrighteous, however righteous has been the motive.

Perhaps one of the greatest, if not the greatest, of our Presidents, Woodrow Wilson—a hundred years ahead of his time—attempted to get the world to organize itself upon a righteous basis and say: War shall be no more. We had not gotten far enough along for that. We are still

heathen, and have made very slight progress in Christian civilization.

The Kingdom of God is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.

Now, the third law—primary law—is the law of love. By this law Christ gives us a dynamic which will impel men to meet their obligations to God and society. Oh, what a wonderful thing it is! A thousand miles beyond the ten commandments—when Jesus said unto us, in giving us a new commandment: “that you love one another as I have loved you”. There isn’t anything in that statement that is in the ten commandments. The highest standard of the ten commandments was, love your neighbor as yourself, but Jesus gave to the world a new law—love your neighbor better than yourself. “A new commandment give I unto you, that you love one another as I have loved you.”

Love is the greatest power in the world. Christ trusted it at all times. Love makes all things work together for good—the home, the school, the factory, the nation, and the Church; all things work together for good where love is the controlling dynamic; everything else will fail, but “Love never faileth: whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now abideth faith, hope, love; but the greatest of these is love.”

My young friends, let me say this word as I close. You are living in the greatest age known to history. The world opens up before you today as it never has to those who

have gone before you. I trust that as you go you will go in the companionship of Jesus Christ, not only your Christ, not only your Savior, but the world's Christ and the world's Redeemer.

It was my privilege a few years ago when in the Orient to be asked one day to address a gathering of Chinese gentry, a group representing the highest walks of commerce and the highest political positions—scholars of their day. There were something like three score who sat with me that day at the table.

During this time I was asked to speak, and I impressed them with the friendly relations existing between our country and theirs, but I closed with this statement: I said: "Gentlemen, my business is to preach Jesus; my business is to help establish the Kingdom of God. We come to the Orient, not with a competitive religion, but we come with a Christ, a religion of righteousness, of love, of mercy and of brotherhood—a religion which if embraced by the Buddhist will make him a part of the brotherhood of humanity". When one of those splendid cultured gentlemen responded, after speaking of what I had said with reference to this country and theirs, he said: "I note what you say with reference to the Christian religion, and if that is what Christianity means, I like it".

When the great International Sunday School convention was in session in the city of Tokyo, Japan, a few years ago—some of you perhaps were present, and you will remember well when that great Japanese scholar was delivering his address of welcome to that vast throng of Christian men and women representing the nations of the earth, among other things he said: "Your religion is a world religion for all men, everywhere".

May God's blessings be with you; may the Holy Spirit guide you in the walk of life that you have chosen, and may you have that consciousness that Jesus is your best friend and your Savior.

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